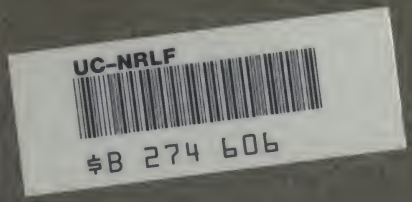
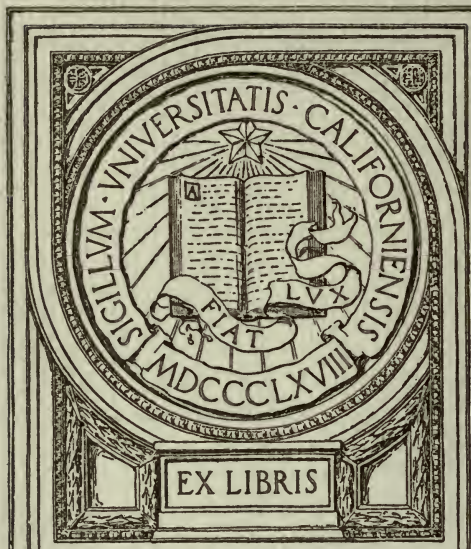
984
I587



YB 13455



EX LIBRIS

964
D587

The Moving Finger of Omar Khayyám.

"The Moving Finger writes and having writ,
Moves on; nor all your piety nor wit
Shall lure it back to cancel half a line,
Nor all your tears blot out a word of it."

From the Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám.

A SERMON BY
REV. E. F. DINSMORE,
MINISTER OF UNITY CHURCH,
SANTA BARBARA, CAL.

UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA

584

The Moving Finger of Omar Khayyám.

"The Moving Finger writes and having writ,
Moves on; nor all your piety nor wit
Shall lure it back to cancel half a line,
Nor all your tears blot out a word of it."

From the Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám.

A SERMON BY
REV. E. F. DINSMORE,
MINISTER OF UNITY CHURCH,
SANTA BARBARA, CAL.

UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA

UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

THE MOVING FINGER.

One reason why I enjoy Omar Khayyam is that, in his treatment of the great questions which exercised his mind, he states the problem instead of solving it—for thus, instead of satisfying, he stimulates and arouses me; because my soul rebels against any suggestion that life holds unsolvable puzzles, and rejects any weak solution; and while I realize that some may regard the questions raised as unanswerable and, overwhelmed by them, indulge in pessimistic wails and the despair of Fatalism, yet these are but the weaklings of the race, and the strong-souled will be stirred by the very difficulties to overcome them: life is not a Cul-de-Sac —a mere blind alley,—and any wall, apparently at the end and seeming to close it, is a spur to effort; and in the solid stone true men will cut steps by which others shall ascend, if they fail to do so. Elihu Vedder, in his magnificent illustrations of Omar's Rubaiyat, gives us, for the verse we are

795267

studying the picture of a chained eagle, suggesting limitation; while in the back-ground the stars are bound, and their course thro' space clearly indicated, their orbits pre-determined.

Now this may do for eagles and stars, but for man, he would be a rash fool who should undertake to define human limits, and to say "Thus far shalt thou go but no farther." The flight of the eagle, it may be, has its bounds, but man has ascended five miles already, and communication with the inhabitants of Mars is suggested as feasible, while the moon, having been examined, is rejected as not being worth annexing. For my part I refuse to be the servant of the past, the slave of yesterday, or the puppet of Fate.

Omar's verse contains the statement of an absolute truth—it suggests not Fate decreeing our future, but the recording of our lives, the irrevocable registration of our thoughts and deeds upon the indestructible parchment of our characters: here is the thought in another form:

> "Across their lives men heedless go,
> Like thieves o'er freshly fallen snow,
> Who think,—if e'er they think at all,—
> That through the night much more will fall
> To cover up their footprints; so
> With booty, laden, home they go.
> But far away from sound or sight
> The Power to whom the dark is light
> Bids Nature send detectives forth,—
> The swift, cold bloodhounds of the north,
> To freeze their footprints in the snow
> And tell the world which way they go."

and happy would men be if the revelation of their footprints was confined to the morning light, to be obliterated by the sun's rays, but it abides.

Now in Omar's verse I believe we have the statement of this truth, which is an integral part of our Liberal Faith, one of the affirmations of Science which we are bound to proclaim because of its vital relation to human welfare:—in the words of an Eastern divine of our faith, if this truth "could be brought home to sinful men without any least exaggeration, but with the unfaltering simplicity of scientific truth, it would breed in them a holy fear more potent to pluck back their feet from paths of vice and crime than any vision of the penal fires that flamed up in the old theology, or any dim reflection of them in the glassy current of the progressive and evasive orthodoxy of the present time."

Deeds are chiselled upon faces until, when a man is 50 years old, the expert can read the story of his life in his countenance: even more true is it that the record of our deeds is unerringly graven upon our characters where, however veiled from other eyes, it blazes forth upon our own vision; and I would a thousand-fold rather have that record exposed to the view of the world, than be obliged to face it myself if it be the record of a life wasted, a record of failure: the contempt of others is hard to bear, but it is the balmy breath of Paradise beside the scorching flames of a soul's contempt for itself.

Our orthodox critics are in the habit of referring to us as the advocates of "an easy system" —but if you are looking for "a cheap and easy method of salvation," either for this life or that to come, I candidly advise you to find it among those who promise you that "The Moving Finger's" record shall be blotted out, the written lines all cancelled, thro' your avowal of faith in their creeds; it is a delusion, but the multitude loves to be deluded: it is my conviction that Omar's verse affirms the unimpeachable truth of an irrevocable record.

And now a thought for those who derive but little comfort from my words, and whose desire is some how, any how, to escape from that record of their folly which has been written in the past, and who eagerly turn to any one who promises them that the record shall be blotted out.

Ah! friends, repentance is a good thing, when it is more than a desire to evade penalty, but resolution is far nobler: a clean past were pleasant to contemplate, but I can offer you a future which no hand but yours can soil. And, believe me, he who writes what can be easily erased writes carelessly. For this reason our wise teachers are insisting that the children in our schools shall use pen and ink rather than erasable pencils.

No soul need dread the past save he in whom it awakens no high purpose for the future—he who looks upon his past with sadness, is he who is capable of facing his future with determination. This truth is finely set forth in the lines:

"Build on resolve, and not upon regret,
The structure of thy future. Do not grope
Among the shadows of old sins, but let
Thine own soul's light shine on the path of hope
And dissipate the darkness. Waste no tears
Upon the blotted record of lost years,
But turn the leaf. and smile, oh, smile, to see
The fair white pages that remain for thee.

Prate not of thy repentance. But believe
The spark divine dwells in thee: let it grow.
That which the upreaching spirit can achieve,
The grand, and all-creative, forces know;
They will assist and strengthen as the light
Lifts up the acorn to the oak-tree's height.
Thou hast but to resolve, and lo! God's whole
Great universe shall fortify thy soul."

The Persian poet's verse seems like an acknowledgment that we are the creatures of Fate, and I am not disposed to sneer at the combination of circumstances which men call Fate, and among which what we call Environment and Heredity are potent powers—but the story of the progress of life, from monad to man, is a tale of the surmounting of these influences, and it is man's duty to master fate and not cower before it.

Magnify fate as you will, I assert that a more masterful force is the life principle, which has evolved wings from fins and arms from wings, and which enables a man of will to turn his back upon his past and without cancelling, retrieve it.

"I like the man who faces what he must
With step triumphant and a heart of cheer;
Who fights the daily battle without fear;

Sees his hopes fail, yet keeps unfaltering trust
That God is God; that, somehow, true and just
His plans work out for mortals. Not a tear
Is shed when fortune, which the world holds dear,
Falls from his grasp: better with love a crust
Than living in dishonor; envies not,
Nor loses faith in man; but does his best,
Nor ever murmurs at his humbler lot,
But with a smile and words of hope gives zest
To every toiler. He alone is great,
Who by a life heroic conquers fate."

Much of the disappointment of life arises from our pursuit of will-o'-the-wisps—our reaching after bubbles which float upon the surface of the stream; men say "Fate is against me," when they have been trying to grasp shadows. No man ever earnestly strove after the things which Jesus, and all great Teachers esteemed, and failed to secure them; —in this effort fate has no power to prevent success: —"it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." Luke 12:32. True, the baubles of life are beyond the reach of multitudes who yearn for them, but what of that? The prizes of life it is not within the power of Fate to bestow, or withhold:

"The wisest man could ask no more of fate
Than to be simple, modest, manly, true;
Safe from the many, honored by the few;
Nothing to court in Church, or World, or State,
But inwardly, in secret, to be great."

And no decrees of any power outside himself can prevent a man from becoming this.

And now, I affirm that our certainty that our lives are writing an indelible record, is an occasion for sincere rejoicing to every robust soul.

Omar's lines imply the desire to blot out what is written; the antithesis is the desire for its permanence.

Omar's lines suggest regret over the record, but our lives are not all error; why not take pride in a worthy record?

The blessed truth in Omar's lines is that no power can blot out the record of that which is worth writing.

Every false act mars character; true! true! but equally true is it that every true act makes character: and were it not for the certainty of the former, we should have no assurance of the truth of the latter.

And so I come to the important word of this discourse: forget, if you will, all else, but remember this:—it is for ourselves to determine what record the eternal finger shall write—this makes us the master of our fate.

"The Moving Finger writes; and, having writ,
Moves on: nor all your piety nor wit
Shall lure it back to cancel half a line,
Nor all your tears wash out a word of it."

Alas! and alas! you say:—but what that record shall be, it is for yourself to decide—escape its writing, you cannot, but that which shall be written it is for you and you alone to determine:—the writing is inevitable, ineffaceable, make it such as

you would have it to be, rejoicing that no power can prevent or erase the writing.

And so, with apologies, I say:

"The Moving Finger writes," but what is writ
Depends upon ourselves; and since nor wit,
Nor piety, nor tears, can change a line,
We should select with care each word of it.

Or in this more personal manner:—

"The Moving Finger writes," but what is writ
Is first determined by my own, sole, wit:
Then I may leave that which, in every line,
Shall give me pride in every word of it.

Why should man shrink and cower from facing a record which himself determines? My answer then to Omar's verse is this:

"The Moving Finger writes," and by no power
Shall what it writes be blotted from the scroll?
Then will I make the record, every hour,
Reveal the upward movement of my soul.

PRESS OF EUGENE A. GRANT, CLOCK BUILDING, SANTA BARBARA, CAL.

Pamphlet
Binder
Gaylord Bros., Inc.
Makers
Stockton, Calif.
PAT. JAN. 21, 1908

YB 1345

795267

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LIBRARY